

WHITEPAPER

WHAT DO PEOPLE REALLY WANT?

WHY EMPATHY IS CRITICAL IN
LEADERSHIP

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FASTER HORSES

The Model T Ford transformed the world. With revolutionary manufacturing practices and ruthless efficiency, Henry Ford made the previous luxury of motor vehicle ownership accessible to the masses. This historic innovation has certainly impacted so many of our lives, but how did the idea come to Henry?

In today's terms, you might expect Ford did customer focus groups, mocked up designs and failed fast with customer testing... and you would be wrong. Actually, Henry is famously quoted as saying: "If I'd have asked people what they wanted, they'd have said faster horses."

Instead, it appears Ford invented the perfect way to solve a deep, unspoken need of the people. People may have bought a Model T for transportation, maybe for the status or maybe to impress a suitor? The reasons could be varied for individuals, we all seem to have our reasons. But let me ask you this. Why did you choose the car you last bought? If not a car, maybe a pair of shoes or clothing. Why did you choose the one you bought?



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There is a good chance you will come up with a reason. There is also a good chance it isn't really why. It isn't that you are being intentionally deceitful, you are probably thinking that your reasons are real and this doesn't apply to you. But stay with me, you might be in for a surprise.

Patients with severe epilepsy have been traditionally treated surgically by severing their Corpus Collosum. This interesting part of the brain connects the otherwise largely independent left and right hemispheres of the brain. This surgery significantly reduces the severity of epileptic episodes in some patients without the terrible side effects you might expect.

This surgery also has allowed neuroscientist some amazing opportunities to understand the way our brains work. See, when the hemispheres are separated, it is possible to interact with each side independently and understand what they do. This has helped us understand that left brains are more logical, detail focused and generate our verbal language. On the other side, our right brains are more big picture, abstract meaning makers and can't generate coherent language.

In one set of experiments, researchers would show the participant an instruction only into their left eye, which is processed in the right brain.



This instruction would be to stand up and exit the room. They would then stand and walk out the door. Outside the room, another experimenter would ask the participant why they had walked out of the room. Interestingly, none of them said it was because they were instructed to, because the left brain which provides the language-based answer had never received this information.

More surprisingly, most participants did give an answer. Some said they needed to go to the bathroom

or that they were thirsty. Most made up a reason, despite the experimenters knowing this not to be the actual reason. It seems our brains love certainty so much, we are more than willing to come up with a rational reason to justify our actions, even if it isn't true at all.

So, how might this be impacting on your leadership? Everyday, we need to work with a vast number of people. We have meetings, workshops, phone calls, emails, coffee chats and brief passes in corridors. We have to convince, motivate and inspire groups of people to buy stuff, do stuff and think stuff constantly. Leadership is the act of leading groups of people, so understanding what these people really want is a critical ingredient.

If you rely on customer focus groups and surveys to understand what they want, they might be lying to you.

If you are relying on employee surveys to build engagement and productivity, you might be missing the real drivers.

If you are expecting people will tell you what they really want, you might be setting yourself up for disappointment.

This is why empathy is so much more than just listening to what people say. In our Leadership workshops, we work on developing your ability to examine the rational, emotional and contextual drivers of those you are looking to understand. We use our powerful Perspective Taking tools to open your eyes, ears and brain to really uncover what is going on.

Empathic Consulting builds leadership capabilities to drive high performance teams. We believe empathy is the super skill leaders need to inspire a better future.

Find out more at
empathicconsulting.com.



Past clients say...

"Thought inspiring, provoking and interesting. Took you through the emotional journey of using empathy in your business"

- Robbie Cooke, CEO, Tyro Payments

"Fantastic both in content and delivery. I was looking for someone to open up other ways of approaching leadership and looking at our business environment and they delivered!- Michaela Flanagan, Head of Branch Operations, Swiss Re

"I can honestly say it was one of the best sessions I have been a part of. The content was unique & very interactive. I highly recommend Empathic Consulting to build empathy & understanding to drive performance."

- Daniel Markovski, Group Sales Manager, Nova

"They engaged people who I didn't think would ever respond, let alone take away actions. Post this session, I observed genuine behaviour changes . This was one of the best things I have done for the team."

- Rochelle Eldridge, Executive Manager, CBA

Clients include:



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